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THE PROFESSIONAL PREPARATION OF READING TEACHERS AND SPECIALISTS IN CANADIAN UNIVERSITIES AND COLLEGES

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Recent years have witnessed a marked increase in the number of instructional methods and materials designed to facilitate the teaching of reading (Aukerman, 1971; Chall, 1967). In an attempt to determine the relative effectiveness of different methods for reading instruction in the first grade, Bond and Dykstra coordinated an extensive series of studies. On the basis of their findings, they concluded:

> Future research might well center on teacher and learning situation characteristics rather than method and materials. The tremendous range among classrooms within any method points out the importance of elements in the learning situation over and above the methods employed. To improve reading instruction, it is necessary to train better teachers of reading rather than to expect a panacea in the form of materials (1967, p. 123).

Other research suggests that the conclusion of Bond and Tinker is valid for reading instruction in the intermediate grades as well as the first grade. In a longitudinal study, Hoyt and Blackmore (1960) studied factors which could account for the growing discrepancy which they found between reading

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achievement and reading expectancy scores among fifty seventh grade pupils during their years in school. At the seventh grade, about 85% of these pupils were achieving below their expected level in reading. On the basis of their observations of teaching practices and interviews with teachers, the investigators concluded that "the most decisive factor" in determining the reading achievement of these pupils was "the kind of instruction offered the children in the intermediate grades (p. 165)." Morrison and Perry (1959) reported similar findings in a study of trends in reading retardation and acceleration among 1,007 pupils in grades three through eight. Reading retardation and acceleration were determined by comparisons between pupil reading grade level and actual grade placement. The investigators found reading retardation to increase with grade level while reading acceleration decreased. When teaching procedures were evaluated and compared with pupil reading achievement, the investigators concluded that inferior teaching was related to low pupil achievement.

Recognition of the importance of teacher effectiveness to reading achievement has prompted sustained interest in the preservice preparation of reading teachers. On the basis of their comprehensive survey of the college and university preparation of future reading teachers in the United States, Austin, Kenney, and Gutmann (1961) concluded that many

classroom teachers were not adequately prepared to teach reading. More recently, Roeder (1971) determined that 89% of United States colleges and universities offering courses in elementary education required future elementary teachers to take a course in the teaching of reading. However, he cautioned that since 16% of the institutions surveyed combined their course in the teaching of reading with another methods course (usually language arts), the effectiveness of these courses in preparing future reading teachers may be limited.

In Canada, the importance of the professional preparation of reading teachers has been recognized for over a decade. In 1959, Norton reported the findings of an informal survey of the preservice preparation and subsequent performance of Canadian reading teachers. She concluded that "the teaching of reading in most of our Canadian classrooms lags far behind research (p. 41)." Two major recommendations emerged from her study. The first was for longer and more effective periods of preparation for prospective reading teachers. The second recommendation was for more and better prepared supervisors of reading. One year later, Lampard (1960), in describing problems in training future reading teachers in Canada, emphasized the need to develop "coordinated and articulated reading programs for students in training (p. 57)." She also pointed to an overemphasis on the training of primary reading teachers at the expense of needed training of intermediate and secondary reading teachers.

The relationship between the preservice preparation of Canadian reading teachers and the reading achievement of their pupils has been indicated by the findings of a study conducted in Alberta by Tetley and Jenkinson (1964). Data on forty-nine teachers and 957 pupils were obtained from school records in order to investigate the effect of a number of teacher characteristics on pupil reading achievement in grades four, five, and six. An analysis of covariance produced "fairly conclusive evidence (p. 3)" that specialized preservice training in teaching reading (defined as courses taken beyond a general introductory course in reading) was positively related to teacher effectiveness as determined by pupil achievement in reading.

Although Canadian educators have recognized the importance of the professional preparation of reading teachers and specialists for all levels, little information is available to indicate the capability of Canadian universities and colleges to provide this preparation. The purpose of this study was to determine the extent to which Canadian universities and colleges offering undergraduate and graduate programmes in teacher education provided courses for the professional preparation of reading teachers and specialists.

Method

Population

The institutions surveyed were the forty-one Canadian universities and colleges which offered undergraduate and

graduate programmes in education leading to certification by the provincial departments of education in their respective provinces. These institutions are located in all ten provinces and were identified by reference to publications of the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (1970) and the Ontario Department of Colleges and Universities (1971).

Data Gathering

During the 1971-72 academic year, a questionnarie was designed and sent to the dean or head of the department of education at each institution. The questionnaire solicited information concerning the undergraduate and graduate level course requirements and electives in reading education and in related areas offered at their institutions. The questionnaire was designed to include the minimum standards for the preparation of classroom reading teachers and specialists as established by the International Reading Association (1965, 1968).

Forty institutions, representing 97.3% of those surveyed, responded to either the initial questionnaire or to one of the two following questionnaires sent to those institutions which did not initially respond. Only one institution failed to respond.

Analysis of Data

Each returned questionnaire was analyzed and the course requirements and/or electives in reading education and related areas at the undergraduate and graduate levels were tallied, frequencies were determined, and percentages computed.

Findings

Elementary Programmes

Thirty-eight institutions, or 95.0% of those responding, offered programmes in elementary education. The extent to which these programmes included courses in reading education and related areas is indicated in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

The majority of elementary programmes included preparation for reading instruction within general language arts courses. A separate course in the teaching of developmental reading was available at exactly one-half of the institutions surveyed and was required at less than one-third of these institutions. Seven institutions required virtually no preservice preparation in the teaching of reading. A course in corrective reading was available at less than one-third of the institutions, while a course in childrens' literature was offered at exactly one-half of the institutions.

Secondary Programmes

Twenty-four institutions, or 60.0% of those responding, offered programmes for the preparation of secondary teachers. Table 2 indicates the number and percentages of these programmes which included courses in reading education.

Insert Table 2 about here

A course in developmental reading was available at thirteen, or 54.2% of the institutions surveyed. In all but one institution, this course was not a programme requirement. Corrective reading was an elective at five, or 20.8% of these institutions. Only one institution clearly indicated that its secondary English methods course included preparation for the teaching of reading. No other methods courses in secondary content areas appeared to introduce prospective secondary teachers to teaching the reading and study skills related to their subject areas.

Graduate Programmes

Thirteen institutions representing 32.5% of those surveyed offered master's degrees in reading education, while six of these institutions representing 15.0% of those surveyed offered doctorates. Eight institutions located in seven provinces offered graduate programmes which included the reading courses recommended by the International Reading Association (1968) for the professional preparation of special teachers of reading and reading clinicians. Only two graduate programmes (15.4%) included courses which the International Reading Association recommends for the preparation of reading consultants and supervisors. It should be added that in only two institutions were graduate programmes apparently designed to give prospective reading specialists actual field experience.

Discussion

Two limitations of this study affect the conclusions which can be drawn from the findings. The first results from the difficulty of comparing courses apparently falling within the same category but offered at different institutions. Although course titles may be similar or even identical, the quality and content of courses may vary considerably. A second limitation relates to the duration of these courses. Most Canadian university and college courses are given over an entire academic year. In some institutions, however, courses are offered on a semester basis or according to some other schedule. In analyzing the data derived from this survey, no attempt was made to distinguish among courses offered over different lengths of time.

Despite these limitations, certain conclusions based on the findings of this study are warranted. The majority of institutions offering elementary education programmes included preparation for reading instruction within more general language arts courses. This practice is questionable. It is unlikely that future teachers can be adequately prepared to teach an activity as complex as reading within the context of broader courses. Moreover, unless all students attending institutions where a course in reading education was not a requirement elected to take such a course (assuming one was available), some elementary teachers entered the field having received virtually no professional preparation in the

teaching of reading. This condition exists despite the recognized importance of the preservice education of reading teachers for pupil achievement in reading.

Equally serious is the situation with respect to preservice preparation in elementary corrective reading. Despite general recognition of the wide range of pupil reading achievement in the elementary grades and the need for corrective teaching to meet the needs of pupils experiencing reading difficulties, less than one-third of the institutions offered a course in corrective reading. Another discouraging finding was that one-half of the institutions offered a course in childrens' literature, a necessary accompaniment to any teacher's professional preparation for reading instruction.

Almost one-half of the programmes in secondary education did not include a course in developmental reading. These programmes thereby failed to prepare secondary teachers to teach the reading and study skills necessary for successful student learning in the secondary grades. This shortcoming is especially serious since secondary methods courses did not appear to consider the development of appropriate reading and study dkills. In addition, the fact that relatively few institutions offered courses insecondary corrective reading reflects the common but naive belief that, because students somehow manage to enter the secondary grades, they bring with them and subsequently encounter no reading difficulties.

In some respects, the most serious deficiencies in Canadian reading education exist in the graduate programmes. The need for professionally prepared reading specialists to initiate, develop, and administer reading programmes in Canadian schools has been generally accepted. Yet only two institutions offered programmes which met the minimum standards of the International Reading Association for reading consultants and supervisors. Without professionally trained personnel in these positions, the guidance of reading programmes will inevitably fall into the hands of inadequately prepared administrators. Moreover, only eight institutions offered programmes suitable for the preparation of special teachers of reading and reading clinicians. These teachers are responsible for the diagnosis and treatment of childrens' reading difficulties. Without adequate teacher preparation, these difficulties will almost certainly remain ignored.

The findings of this study indicate that the future growth of Canadian reading education demands development and change in both undergraduate and graduate programmes. It is essential that elementary education programmes include a required basic course in the teaching of reading. It is also highly desirable that these programmes include a course in corrective reading in order that prospective elementary teachers are prepared to remedy the reading difficulties to be encountered in their classes. In secondary programmes, the need to prepare

secondary teachers to teach the reading and study skills appropriate to learning in their respective subject areas demands further recognition. At the graduate level, some existing programmes require strengthening in order to bring them to the level where they provide adequate professional preparation for reading specialists. It is equally necessary to establish more graduate programmes for the preparation of reading specialists in provinces where such programmes are not available.

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TABLE 1

COURSES OFFERED IN READING EDUCATION AND RELATED AREAS IN ELEMENTARY EDUCATION PROGRAMMES AT CANADIAN UNIVERSITIES AND COLLEGES

Course Description	Freq.	%
Language Arts Excluding Reading		
Required	8	21.1
Elective	5	13.2
Total	13	34.3
Language Arts Including Reading		
Required	21	55.3
Elective	1	2.6
Total	22	57.9
Developmental Reading		
Required	10	26.3
Elective	9	23.7
Total	19	50.0
Corrective Reading		
Required	1	2.6
Elective	10	26.3
Total	11	28.9

TABLE 1 (CONTINUED)

Course Description	Freq.	%
Childrens' Literature		
Required	3	7.9
Elective	16	42.1
Total	19	50.0

Note.--Thirty-eight institutions offered programmes in elementary education.

TABLE 2

COURSES OFFERED IN READING EDUCATION IN SECONDARY EDUCATION PROGRAMMES AT CANADIAN UNIVERSITIES AND COLLEGES

Course Description	Freq.	%
Developmental Reading		
Required	1	4.2
Elective	12	50.0
Total	13	54.2
Corrective Reading		
Required	0	0.0
Elective	5	20.8
Total	5	20.8

Note.-- Twenty-four institutions offered programmes in secondary education.

Abstract

The relationship between teacher competence and pupil reading achievement is recognized. This study sought to determine the extent to which Canadian universities and colleges provided courses for the professional preparation of reading teachers and specialists. A questionnaire sent to all relevant institutions revealed that most elementary education programmes included reading within language arts courses. Developmental reading was included in one-half of the programmes, corrective reading in one-third. One-half of secondary education programmes included developmental reading, while one-fifth of these programmes included corrective reading. Eight graduate programmes offered courses recommended for reading specialists. Further development of programmes for the professional preparation of Canadian reading teachers and specialists is needed.